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THE HALF-PEACE

Mr. Vishinsky is attending the Assembly meetings of the United Nations held in New York. There will be gathered there, in effect, all the interests that are engaged in war in Korea. Whilst the war proceeds and a land is desolated representatives of the nations of the world will gather together and, no doubt, discuss in bitter terms the clash of interests and power that the Korean war represents. The men, women and children fighting and dying in Korea (the ordinary human beings whose lives have been uprooted and changed into tragedy) will be the living and dying representatives of those delegations in New York. In ancient Rome the Senators - or more-realistically the handful of powerful men who ruled Rome - left their deliberations to go to the Circus and watch half-a-dozen men being mauled to death by wild animals. Today, modern civilisation, advancing as Mr. T. S. Eliot says "progressively backwards", has improved on that. It can stage a battlefield with thousands of men trying to kill one another, and untold thousands behind them being plunged in misery too deep for words, whilst the men of power - or for that matter the men of no power - discuss calmly what is taking place. The modern Circus, because of modern susceptibilities, is hidden from the physical eyes of men who do not want to be disturbed. But it is there; and the barbarity of ancient Rome is but a drop in the bucket compared with the barbarity which modern ingenuity can produce.

The world is sitting around the Circus of Korea.

What can the ordinary man do? He can at least withdraw from the despicable convention of calling the men great who are responsible for this kind of thing. He can at least be independent enough not to kowtow to all the "isms" with their millions of blind devotees who can only find reasons for loving their neighbour when they can stab, or more particularly blast, to death someone else. He can withdraw from the conventions, the cheap and easy faiths, the lies and myths that form the spiritual pabulum of so many millions who want to "change the world" or equally to "keep it as it is". He can withdraw, and with a soul scourged by inner discipline return to the market place or the meeting and pour contempt on the lies by which men live.

The ordinary man is not helpless. His fate is in his own hands. But it must be hands willing to work and to be lifted up for causes far removed from this world's conventions.

A MINORITY MOVEMENT ?

by G. Randall Jones, B.D.

If we accept the fact that we are a minority movement, what can we do about it? The first thing to do is to find out why we are a minority movement. I have been trying to do that for years past. Several answers have been suggested. One answer, dear to the hearts of some Unitarians, is to the effect that "Truth is ever on the scaffold, and Wrong is ever on the throne"; therefore, Unitarians can never hope to be more than a small band of somewhat lonely pioneers, and they must draw what comfort they can from the thought that "the scaffold sways the future".

I should hate to say a word which might distress those who find comfort in this thought, more especially because I recognise that there is a great deal of truth in it. But it does not comfort me. Interpreted in certain ways, it seems to me to come dangerously near to the suggestion that minorites are usually, even necessarily, right; whereas I believe that Truth and Right are absolutely independent of majorities or minorities.

Another possible answer suggests that perhaps, after all, what we stand for is not True, not Right. I will not pause to examine this suggestion, because the very fact that we are still in the minority movement, or at least in sympathy with it, proves that we have ourselves examined the suggestion, possibly with anxious thought and prayer, and rejected it.

Then why are our churches, on the whole, less well attended than those of the great "orthodox" bodies ? Why are we still a minority movement? I have no completely satisfying answer - the nearest I can get to it is this: I think that, on the whole, the "orthodox" churches have been more successful than we in emphasising the truth that "it is surely as sweet and needful as it is fitting that we should spend in the house of prayer a part of our day of rest".

There is a reason for this, and the reason is not altogether discreditable to those associated with Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. It is a question of duty. Broadly speaking, there are two ways of performing a duty - we may perform it in obedience to the command of an external authority, or we may perform it in response to the promptings of our own spirits.

Now, for the worship in our Unitarian and Free Christian Churches we depend utterly and exclusively on the interior authority - the authority of the Spirit that speaks directly to spirit. But in the great "orthodox" communions, such as the Church of Rome, the external authority is very much in evidence.

That, I think, is part of the reason why our Unitarian and Free Christian Churches are less well attended than the churches of the "orthodox" communions. Men need authority, and they seek it outside themselves, and the "orthodox" churches say they have it. We make no such claim. The world has not yet realised that the only authority worth having in matters of religion is the authority which is inward and spiritual.

I note with great interest, therefore, that the first specific objective submitted to the delegates at the recent Anniversary Meetings of the American Unitarian Association was: "A renewed emphasis upon the practice of regular attendance at the services of worship in our churches as the first obligation of church members". The first obligation! It is an obligation. But not one imposed by external authority. It remains for us to show that the obligations gladly accepted by free spirits can be as compelling, and as effective, as those imposed by external authorities. If and when we succeed in doing this, we shall indeed be "the largest single denomination in the country".

CORRESPONDENCE

Letters should be addressed to the Editor, "The Inquirer", 14 Gordon Square, London, W.C.1. They should not in general exceed three to four hundred words in length.

Closed Churches. - My church here at Colne is one of those which closes for Holiday Sunday. For this we do not apologise. As in many other Lancashire towns, the holiday week still creates a traditional exodus. The majority of the congregation who attend and uphold the church during the other 51 weeks of the year. . . . are out of town. Of the few who remain, most will take a quiet day in the countryside. (Not a bad way of coming close to God.) To provide a service would usually mean someone acting as caretaker. . . searching for an organist. . . and asking a Methodist local preacher to take the service. . . all for the odd stranger who might not come and certainly never comes near during the other 51 weeks when the church is open. I suspect that most other churches which are closed for holidays are closed for equally cogent reasons and not for the pleasure of the thing.

- Maurice Bonner, Colne.

Suggestion to Districts.- May I suggest that the following be considered by all district associations at their next meeting:-

We accept that we are not doing all we can to attract more people to our fellowship, and agree that we should be willing to consider any criticisms and suggestions.

We are very often quick to notice faults in strange churches and even in those near to us which are not the one we ourselves attend, therefore:

Each district association should appoint a visiting committee (as small as practicable) to tour its churches without their visits being pre-arranged, and forward to the committee of each church its views on what should be done to improve the appearance of its buildings and its appeal to strangers. The visiting committee should also report to the D.A. so that any required assistance may be discussed.

Maybe financial help would be needed and even a volunteer labour force to get the jobs done, but are we not capable of this?

Will D. A. secretaries put this on their agenda NOW?

- Arthur Wilson, Penycraig, Rhondda.

Science and the Layman.- The Rev. Basil Viney writes that "the mere layman is getting rather tired of astronomical theories; they so soon replace each other". The scientist would hold a different view: that these changes are a healthy sign showing that astronomy is a developing science. It is in one of those intriguing stages when succeeding investigations promote very rapid extensions in theory and allow the true scientific imagination great scope in extending the boundaries of the subject. At the other extreme is the concept which remains virtually unchanged for decades or even centuries, e.g. that of the Philosopher's Stone, pursued by the alchemists for its power of converting base metals into gold. I hope Mr. Viney would not have us lapse into such a period of stagnation.

I hope, too, that he will not think I am being personal if I regret the present-day lack of understanding among intelligent laymen of the essential principles of science which seem to be exemplified by his letter. Not that the blame for this rests solely with the layman, for whom one has every sympathy in his attempt to follow the rapid advances of science. The scientific body as a whole (and the individual scientist in so far as he can) has a duty to explain its activities and achievements to the layman. Mr. Hoyle (whose lectures were the cause of this correspondence) has done his share very ably.

- J.J.Kipling, Hull.

NEWS REVIEW

CHESTER: In October the congregation will celebrate the 250 years of public worship. The Lesson at the morning Civic Service will be read by Sir Felix Brunner. At the Bicentenary celebrations in 1900, the late Sir John Brunner, of Liverpool University, Chairman of Brunner Mond, Ltd., and a Trustee of the Chapel, made a gift of the two splendid, artistic, stained-glass memorial windows to the Rev. Matthew Henry and the Rev. Dr. James Martineau and in this manner commemorate permanently the two hundredth Anniversary of the Chapel. Sir Felix Brunner, grandson of the late Sir John Brunner, lives near London, though he is well known in Cheshire.

MACCLESFIELD: The congregation of King Edward St. Chapel celebrated the 260th anniversary on Thursday, August 24th, the exact date of "the first preaching", according to the chapel records. Rev. E.E. Wrigley of Dean Row, president of the East Cheshire Christian Union, was the preacher, and the Mayor of Macclesfield also gave a short address. The choir sang unaccompanied anthems by Tye and Palestrina. Members of Unity Free Christian Church also attended the service.

POOLE: The Junior Church started three months ago by the Minister and helpers reports satisfactory progress - these services held on Sunday mornings seem to have a special appeal and though yet small in number the atmosphere of reverence maintained is encouraging.

RINGWOOD: A notable feature of the Sunday School Anniversary is the United Scholars Service in the afternoon, attended by children and teachers of the Congregational, Methodist and Salvation Army Sunday Schools. The Church Anniversary, celebrating the 225th anniversary of the opening of the Meeting House and the 278 years or more existence of the congregation, was held on 25th June.

SCARBOROUGH AND WHITBY: The Rev. W.T. Wilkins, formerly of Dudley, has taken up his pastorate at Scarborough and Whitby. He conducted his first service at Scarborough on Sunday, August 27 - which was the occasion of the Church Anniversary - and preached his first sermon at Whitby on Sunday, September 3. Mr. Wilkins' service of induction to the pastorate was conducted by the Rev. T. Brett Davies, of Pudsey, secretary of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union, on Wednesday, August 30, when the charge to the congregation was given by the Rev. H.W. Kemshall, Minister at Scarborough until October last. The charge to Mr. Wilkins was given by the Rev. R. Philipson.

SOUTH SHIELDS: The church was full on Sunday, September 3rd for the Centenary Community Service. The Home Secretary, Mr. Chuter Ede, read the lessons, and the Mayor and Mayoress, Coun. and Mrs. Bainbridge were present. Mr. Eric Wild conducted the service, and Mr. Ronald McGraw, both students of the Unitarian College, Manchester, gave the address. Mr. Chuter Ede warmed the hearts of all, particularly the children. He not only signed their autograph books but copied a hymn verse in each.

SOUTHAMPTON: At the Annual Congregational Meeting there were encouraging reports of satisfactory finances and an increase in membership.

WAREHAM: After extensive repairs and the devoted labour of the faithful few in renovating the Church, the congregation meets weekly in a beautifully transformed place of worship. The plans are going ahead for further activity and Unitarian influence in the town under the leadership of the newly appointed Lay-Pastor, Mr. L.R. McCulloch.

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